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The Washington Post
The New York Times
The Washington Times
The Wall Street Journal
The Christian Science Monitor
New York Daily News
USA Today 2A
The Chicago Tribune
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CIA's Webster says Gorbachev may be out soon

By Sam Vincent Meddis
USA TODAY

CIA Director William Webster used a farewell meeting with reporters Thursday to suggest that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's days in office may be numbered, too.

"Moses didn't get to the promised land, and this may be the case with Gorbachev," said Webster, who announced his resignation from the Central Intelligence Agency earlier this month.

Webster, 67, appearing fit and relaxed in fast-moving repartee with reporters, offered a grim assessment of the outlook for the Soviet Union, historically the prime focus of U.S. intelligence.

Gorbachev's future is "increasingly uncertain" because of pressures from secessionist republics and a sagging economy, said Webster, who is completing nearly four years as the nation's top spy.

The problem: Moscow is asking for billions of dollars in aid but has "no clear game plan" on how the money will produce lasting results.

He said he was "cautiously optimistic" that Iran may be warming to the West and that release of hostages held by pro-Iranian radicals in Lebanon may be nearer.

Webster, a former FBI director and federal judge is expected to return to the private practice of law.

The Senate Intelligence Committee hasn't set a date yet for hearings on President Bush's choice to replace Webster, White House deputy national security adviser Robert Gates. Webster backed Gates, a former CIA deputy director. Webster is expected to stay on the job until a successor is sworn in, perhaps next month.

Gates is likely to be grilled at the hearings about his involvement in the Reagan administration's Iran-contra affair. He was the top deputy to former CIA director William Casey, a key figure in the scandal.

But Webster, who built a reputation for integrity as CIA director, said he ordered an early review of the Iran-contra operation and found no wrongdoing by Gates.

By David Tellez, USA TODAY
WEBSTER: Fit and relaxed for farewell meeting

Gates in no way supported "off-the-wall operations," said Webster, appointed by Reagan to take over the CIA after the affair was exposed and Casey died in 1987.

Webster also said:

▶ The Soviets are "essentially in a defensive mode" and the chances of an attack on the West continue to slide. But given the instability in some regions, Moscow is edgy about losing control of nuclear weapons.

▶ Iraq's President Saddam Hussein is "very much in charge" — and the best leverage for forcing him out rests with the international blockade of Iraq's oil exports.

▶ There's evidence of increases in foreign drug crops and an apparently decreased commitment to the war on drugs in some countries, including Colombia.

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